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Italian Visa Centers Ban Third-Party Submissions, Russian Tour Lobby Says

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Sergei Fadeichev / TASS

Italian visa centers have stopped accepting documents for Russian travelers via intermediaries following a scandal involving an alleged illicit Schengen visa scheme, the Association of Tour Operators of Russia (ATOR) said Thursday.

“Agents, couriers, authorized representatives, notaries and lawyers can no longer submit applications on behalf of a tourist,” ATOR said in a statement.

“Applicants must now appear in person at the visa center at their scheduled time with passports and a confirmed online appointment,” it added.

The change was reportedly enacted after the arrest of Italy’s former ambassador in Uzbekistan over an alleged scheme involving illicit Schengen visa approvals.

Investigators accused the ambassador and his assistant, an ethnic Russian, of issuing one-to-three-year Schengen visas to 95 Russians who failed to meet entry requirements, according to

ATOR.

The association cited sources as saying that “a few” companies have retained their role as intermediaries provided that the client books a full tour package, including hotel, airfare and insurance.

Italy’s VMS visa center in Moscow told Russia’s state-run TASS news agency that it was not aware of the need for Russian travelers to appear in person and forwarded all queries to the Italian Consulate.

The Italian Embassy in Moscow told the news outlet RBC later on Thursday that it had not made any changes to visa application procedures.

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